

A Comparison of the Hawk Image in *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Hawk Roosting*

COMPARAISON DE L'IMAGE DE L'AIGLE DANS *THE HAWK IN THE RAIN* ET *HAWK ROOSTING*

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Abstract: The Hawk in the Rain is Ted Hughes's first collection of poetry in which the title poem is included. Hawk Roosting appearing in the second book of Ted Hughes is his masterpiece among his animal poems. Both of the hawk image in the above two poems have long been the focus of the critics and poetry reviewers, and they are often discussed separately. However, there must be some differences besides the similarities between the two so that why the same image "hawk" is used twice in Ted's two important poems can be illustrated. This thesis will focus on this point to discover the meaning of these differences out of their similarities.

Key words: Image Creation, Hawk, Man, Similarities, Differences

Résumé: *The Hawk in the Rain* publié en 1957 est le premier recueil de poèmes du poète lauréat britannique Ted Hughes, dans lequel se trouve un poème au même titre *The Hawk in the Rain*. En 1960, il publia son deuxième recueil intitulé *Lupercal* dans lequel on trouve aussi un poème sur l'aigle- *Hawk Roosting*. Ces deux poèmes font depuis longtemps l'objet du sujet de discussion des critiques et des amateurs de littérature. En outre, la plupart des discussions sur l'image de l'aigle se font respectivement dans ces deux poèmes. Mais l'auteur pense qu'il y a certainement des causes profondes pour Hughes d'utiliser deux fois la même image pour créer deux poèmes différents dans ses deux recueils consécutivement publiés. Donc, l'exploration de ces raisons doit partir de l'analyse comparative de ces deux poèmes. L'article présent, commençant par l'analyse de leurs ressemblances et différences, étudie la valeur et la signification spécifiques de la même image dans de différents poèmes.

Mots-Clés: image, aigle, homme, ressemblance, différence

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Brief Introduction of the Two Poems by Ted Hughes

In 1957, the great English poet laureate Ted Hughes published his first collection of poems, among which the title poem *The Hawk in the Rain* has long been widely discussed and frequently quoted by the literature reviewers and enthusiastic readers. Three years after 1957, Ted's second book of poetry *Lupercal* came out. In this volume, he included a prominent and typical poem named *Hawk Roosting*, which became the representative work of his nature poems.

The Hawk in the Rain presents such a picture: faced with the natural difficulties ("drumming ploughland",

"swallowing of the earth's mouth", "banging wind", etc. Ted Hughes, 1995), man is too weak and fragile ("drag up heel after heel", "thumbs my eyes", "tackle my heart", etc. Ted Hughes, 1995) to stand up against it; Yet in the same situation the hawk "effortlessly hangs his still eye" and "his wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet" steadily. (Ted Hughes) In the latter part of the poem, the hawk becomes man's guiding star, and helps him to save his humble life. Then comes the direct conflict between the hawk itself and the nature ("That maybe in his own time meets the weather" Ted Hughes). The hawk died because of "coming the wrong way" (Ted Hughes).

In the poem *Hawk Roosting*, the poet shows the gesture the hawk adopts, its looks and manners, and every move of its thought when perching in the tree. Here the hawk is very much content about his ability in controlling the creations and takes pride in his innate

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physical advantages. The hawk in the poem also demonstrates his free will and absolute power in comparison with other livings.

1.2 Literary Review

Obviously, both *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Hawk Roosting* take the image “hawk” as the hero of the poetic description, and it can be seen in various literary journals and magazines both abroad and at home that the image of “hawk” symbolizes the wildness, adorable violence, bigheartedness of the nature power, and the bravery and straightforward demonstration of its force(張中載, 1996), regardless of the place this image was put. Most critics analyzed the image of hawk in the two poems separately, and scarce articles put the two together to make a comparison or do some research on the same image of different poems, although it is evident that there are similarities and differences in the delineation of poetic image in these two poems. Therefore, in the light of the previous researches on the respective poem, the author here focused on the comparison of the two.

2. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO POEMS IN IMAGE CREATION

2.1 The Same Historical and Cultural Background

In 50s and 60s of the 20th century, the western society witnessed a rapid development of industrialization. Factories were quickly erected; big cities sprang up overnight; farmers had to abandon their plough land and left for the city to seek hope. The commodity economy brought out by the industrialization made people materialized. Human's conquer of nature supplied the industrialization with raw materials and other resources, but meanwhile this also made man even more merciless and greedy, which could be compared to the most bloody animal(劉守蘭, 2003). Regarding the social culture of this time, the unprecedented accomplishment of science and technology led people to the belief in reason and rationality, and the essential nature of man was accordingly repressed. Besides, the immense influence of the Second World War frequently reminded people of human's bloody nature. All these three premises were woven together and deeply influenced the poetry creation of that time.

2.1.1 Interpretation of the Hawk Image in *The Hawk in the Rain* from its Background

In the historical, social and cultural background mentioned above, human then on one hand enjoyed the great success in material, and on the other hand they

were encompassed and caged by the tremendous material possessions produced by them, so the technology was ineffective in filling human with happiness(劉守蘭, 2003). What is more, due to the plunder to the natural world, nature revenged itself against human through natural disasters. A society in such a situation failed its people and the poet Ted Hughes as well. Ted in his poem *The Hawk in the Rain* depicts a vivid picture to indicate the society of that time, and hit the point of the problem between man and nature. In the poem, Ted uses hawk to symbolize the nature in general sense, and the person pronoun “I” refers to all the human being. Faced with the natural difficulties and obstacles, “I” appears to be too weak to stand up against them, yet the hawk as part of the natural world can remain calmly and proudly still and strong. Furthermore, the rain, wind and clay all represent the natural advantages over the human. And finally, the will power of the hawk can even serve as the guiding star of the desperate man (“The hawk hangs the diamond point of will that polestars the sea downer's endurance” Ted Hughes, 1995). So it is easy to draw the conclusion that in the struggle and conflict between man and nature, the nature eventually takes the preference. And then, human loses its control and esteem; the anthropocentrism is knocked down.

2.1.2 Interpretation of the Hawk Image in *Hawk Roosting* from its Background

From the previously offered background, it can be seen that human in the encompassment of material things and rational social conventions was eager to find a way to vent out his in-depth repressions, and the nature poet Ted Hughes timely realized this requirement.

In his poem *Hawk Roosting*, he tries his best to speak highly of the hawk's frankness, great will power and pride in its existence, ability and dominance. This seemingly overestimating depictive words employed in the poem are of strong blood flavor, which is absent from or repressed in the human body. Here the poet called on human to get back to the human nature through demonstrating the admiration of the violence of nature, only by reviving the original source of human, can he get his happiness and restore its energy again. Although many critics hold that the hawk here is a symbol of violence and thus the poem is a song of violence, yet this thesis believes that the poet are more of a nature-power lover than a violence advocate.

2.2 The Same Techniques in Creating the Image of Hawk

Ted Hughes's nature poems impress the reader most by their powerful and skillful image creation, which are very different from that of the traditional English poems. Yet, living in his age, Ted had been also inevitably influenced by the poetic modernism in literature. His images are well chosen, but of broadest sense; his

subject matter is plain, but of great significance.

2.2.1 Similarities in Subject Matter Selection

Of all Hughes' poems, the work of subject matter selection is done within a very large space, and thus his poem will not particularly focus on a certain person or a certain thing. He usually adopts the commonest object in the nature, especially animals, to demonstrate the profoundest theme. It is effortless to find a very familiar animal image in Ted's poems, such as pig, fish, fox, etc. (張中載, 1996:311). accordingly, it is safe to say that the image of hawk in the two poems in question is no exception. They also embody a broad sense, in hopes that the poet can expose his cognition of the commonness between human society and the nature.

The Hawk in the Rain depicts Hawk as the center of the nature's power, along with the wind and rain to confront human. The hawk even "polestars the sea drowner's endurance" (Ted Hughes, 1995). Here clearly, the hawk as a symbol of the mighty natural force takes the control of its surroundings. The struggling and alone hiker represents our human who is in need of the nature's guidance. Here both the hawk and the man are nothing special, but something meaningful. The same is true of the "hawk" in Hawk Roosting. Hawk Roosting is seen as a very symbolic nature poem, since the image of hawk is the bloodiest animal at the top of the food chain (張中載, 1996:314). Yet it symbolizes the vigorous and powerful nature as a whole rather than the bloody animal world itself.

2.2.2 Similarities in language use

The popularity of Ted's poems among the ordinary audience is mainly attributed to its beauty and power of language. It is his good mastery of language that moulds the impressive image of hawk in his two representative poems with hawk as the central image.

Both The Hawk in the Rain and Hawk Roosting are concise, frank, straightforward, plain, and powerful in language (張中載, 1996:316). In Ted's poems, the plainness of language takes place of the flowerage and polishing in the traditional nature poems which seems to Ted too vainglorious; the concrete, accurate and powerful characterization substitutes for the abstract and unsmooth images, thus his poems can be profound in meaning, detailed in delineation without losing its poetic beauty. These characteristics are well reflected in the two poems. In The Hawk in the Rain, the poet uses vivid and specific verbs such as "drag", "swallow", "clutch", etc. to describe the difficult environment man is confronted with. In contrast, such adjectives and adverbs as "effortlessly", "weightlessly", "still", "steady" are employed to characterize the controlling ability and the fearless temperament of an emperor-like hawk. All these words are concrete and accurate in meaning and imaginable in vision, thus a striking picture of man-nature confrontation is skillfully painted.

In Hawk Roosting, verbs like "sit", "hold", "revolve", "kill" exposes to the reader the bloody essence, the superior dominance and the frankness of the hawk. The adjectives and adverbs phrase like "all slowly", "all mine", "the whole of" iconically impress the reader with the hawk's pride and conceit as a dictator.

3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO POEMS IN IMAGE CREATION

3.1 Different Perspectives

It is obvious that in The Hawk in the Rain, the poet uses the first person pronoun "I" to refer to the man in the plot of the poem, while the hawk here is referred to as "he"—a third person pronoun. In the first stanza of the poem, the poet takes great effort to picture a man confronted with a difficult natural surroundings. By using "I" to stand for the human being, the poet emphasizes human's desire to be the dominating point of the whole universe. Yet as the plot of the poem develops, it can be found that the hawk actually takes the upper hand, he "hangs his still eye effortlessly at height", while "I drag up heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth" (Ted Hughes, 1995). Later on, the hawk's will even "polestars the sea drowner's endurance", and I turn to the hawk for the spiritual guiding power. These all tell the vanity of human's effort to be the dominator, and hawk's innate ability to be superior.

In Hawk Roosting, the hawk proudly claims himself as the center of all creation, thus he begins his each piece of remarks with "I". All through the poem, the hawk depicts himself with great frankness and straightforwardness. He is content with his situation, his working ability and his physical and ambient superiorities. He claims that "I kill where I please because it is all mine." (張中載, 1996:314) Though the hawk here seems to be too conceited, he is true and frank in analyzing himself. By employing the first person pronoun, the poet aims to call human's attention and demonstrate the true side of the animal world, which are not only of violence, but also of superior adaptability and tremendous vitality of life.

3.2 Different arrangements of plot

The Hawk in the Rain is more of mobility, and it is a more winding story of a hawk, who witnesses human's fragility and weakness before the nature. But this hawk is finally beaten down by the nature and died. The poet spends most of the lines to make a comparison between the emperor-like hawk and the miserable man in the same surrounding, but in the last stanza the whole story unexpectedly changes its trend and the hawk is

eventually led to death by the weather “coming the wrong way”(Ted Hughes, 1995). Different critics have different interpretations about this sudden diversion, yet this thesis holds that the hawk as part of natural world has its advantage over man, and its death is caused by the nature itself rather than man, so it is a law of nature. No matter how the hawk ends up, man’s idea to dominate this world is not well grounded.

As to the poem Hawk Roosting, no plot development actually exists, so it is a static story in which the hawk keeps depicting, boasting, thinking and reasoning for himself. This divergence in comparison with Hawk in the Rain in this aspect is due to the poet’s purpose in creating different images. The hawk in this poem enjoys his current situation: static but powerful, conceited but confident, silent but authoritative. Hence, by putting the hawk in a static state, the poet left the reader with the impression that the hawk can put the universe under his control even if he takes no action, just like the hawk said: “sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed. No falsifying dreams between my hooked

head and hooked feet or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.”(張中載,1996:314)

4. CONCLUSION

By making a comparison between the above two poems with the same image by the same poet in nearly the same period of time, this thesis tries to tell the differences existing between the two poems from their similarities, and then infers the meaning of these divergences in the respective poem. As the most famous poet in modern England, Ted Hughes’s different poems has long been the focus of attention. This thesis has just lightly touched upon the image of hawk appears in two of his important poems. Though much effort has been paid, the induction and analysis on the hawk image creation may not be so inclusive and in-depth, thus there is still a very large room to do further research on this and the relevant topic.

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